

**Opening Statement of
The Honorable Henry J. Hyde, Chairman
Before the Full Committee**

The International Affairs Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2007”

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Perils of the Golden Theory

Lying at the heart of America’s relationship with the world is a paradox. We have a global reach, voluntarily assuming responsibility for preserving peace and order in much of the world and for the bless-ed charge of bettering the lives of its inhabitants. And yet we are simultaneously very distant from that world, stubbornly uninstructed by its ancient cynicism and preaching a confidence in the future that defies the constraints of the present. This paradox – to massively engage the world while living on an autonomous island in the global sea – is made possible by our unprecedented power.

It is a truism that power breeds arrogance. A far greater danger, however, stems from the self-delusion that is the more certain companion. For individuals and countries alike, power inevitably distorts perceptions of the world by insulating them in a soothing cocoon that is impervious to what scientists term “disconfirming evidence.”

Our power, then, has the grave liability of rendering our theories about the world immune from failure. But by becoming deaf to easily discerned warning signs, we may ignore long-term costs that result from our actions and dismiss reverses that should lead to a reexamination of our goals and means.

To illustrate my point, let me focus one school of thought that has gained increasing prominence in our national debate, namely the assertion that our interests are best advanced by assigning a central place in our foreign policy to the worldwide promotion of democracy. This I term the Golden Theory.

I should state at the outset my own conviction that democracy and freedom are directly linked, and that democracy has proven highly beneficial in those states where it has been securely established. But I take issue with those who argue that it is self-propagating and that it invariably produces beneficent results, for this view rests on a misinterpretation of cause and effect in our history.

Proponents rest much of their case on the triumph of democracy in post-World War II Europe and East Asia, focusing on the peace, stability, and cooperation those war-torn regions have experienced in its aftermath. Certainly, democracy contributed enormously to these

regions' transformations, but I would argue that this outcome depended far more on the direct and long-term presence of American power. Far from being inevitable, prior to 1945, democracy had been virtually wiped out in Europe even before Hitler began his conquests. It had been delegitimized in most of the continent, and authoritarian governments had become the norm. Democracy held on in Britain and in remnants elsewhere in Europe but ultimately survived only because of U.S. intervention in the war.

Following the Allied victory, democracy was reintroduced on the continent in large part because the overwhelming U.S. presence made it both possible and virtually mandatory throughout Western Europe. From this beginning, we devoted enormous resources toward enforcing order, promoting cooperation, defending against invasion, removing barriers, reviving economies, and a host of other unprecedented innovations. The resulting transformation is usually ascribed to the workings of democracy, but it is due far more to the impact of the long-term U.S. presence. And that role continues to this day, six decades later.

In regions where our presence extended over long periods, as in East Asia, the usual result was peace, stability, and cooperation, with democracy as an added and reinforcing benefit. But few areas outside those fortunate lands have become stably democratic, with examples such as India being exceptions that are far too rare.

I note these cases because they are invariably cited by those who believe that similar transformations can be effected elsewhere by the magic formula of democracy alone. But viewed in its more complete historical context, implanting democracy in large areas would require that we possess an unbounded power and undertake an open-ended commitment of time and resources, which we cannot and will not do. But without that long-term dominant American position, the odds of success are long indeed.

I am not suggesting that we adopt a Realpolitik approach. Even were that preferable, which it is not, it is not within the realm of the possible for us. The American people are unlikely to ever accept the U.S. as yet one more actor in a grim Hobbesian world of fear, betrayal, and numbing amorality. And this is all for the best, as the record of the classic balance of power is not to be envied, being an inherently unstable system that has produced worldwide cataclysms in the past.

Of greater centrality, however, is the fact that, by its very nature, the U.S. is a revolutionary power. Its foundational beliefs posit universal truths that permeate all of its actions and perceptions of the world. These have had, and continue to have, catalytic effects on other societies. Fidelity to our ideals means that we have little choice but to support freedom around the world. No one with a heart or a head would wish it otherwise.

But we also have a duty to ourselves and to our own interests, the protection and advancement of which may sometimes necessitate actions focused on more tangible returns than those of altruism. Lashing our interests to the indiscriminate promotion of democracy is a tempting but unwarranted strategy, more a leap of faith than a sober calculation.

There are other negative consequences as well. A broad and energetic promotion of democracy in other countries that will not enjoy our long-term and guiding presence may equate not to peace and stability but to revolution.

We can and have used democracy as a weapon to destabilize our avowed enemies and may do so again. But if we unleash revolutionary forces in the expectation that the result can only be beneficent, I believe we are making a profound and perhaps uncorrectable mistake. History teaches that revolutions are very dangerous things, more often destructive than benign, and uncontrollable by their very nature. Upending established order based on theory is far more likely to produce chaos than shining uplands. Edmund Burke's prescient warning of the deadly progress of the French Revolution, a revolution guided by intoxicating theory and heedless of all warnings, endures.

There is no evidence that we or anyone can guide from afar revolutions we have set in motion. We can more easily destabilize friends and others and give life to chaos and to avowed enemies than ensure outcomes in service of our interests and security.

Let me return to my original theme, namely that our enormous power allows us to maintain a highly theoretical approach to the world, one that draws so deeply from the universal truths embedded in our makeup as to be impervious to contrary evidence.

I am not making an abstract point. We are well advanced into an unformed era in which new and unfamiliar enemies are gathering forces, where a phalanx of aspiring competitors must inevitably constrain and focus our options. In a world where the ratios of strength narrow, the consequences of miscalculation will become progressively more debilitating. The costs of golden theories will be paid for in the base coin of our interests.

For some, the promotion of democracy promises an easy resolution to the many difficult problems we face, a guiding light on a dimly seen horizon. But I believe that great caution is warranted here. Without strong evidence to the contrary, we should not readily believe that, without an enduring American presence, democracy can be so easily implanted and nourished in societies where history and experience suggest it is quite alien. It may, in fact, constitute an uncontrollable experiment with an outcome akin to that faced by the Sorcerer's Apprentice.

A few brief years ago, history was proclaimed to be at an end, our victory engraved in unyielding stone, our preeminence garlanded with permanence. But we must remember that Britain's majestic rule vanished in a few short years, undermined by unforeseen catastrophic events and by new threats that eventually overwhelmed the palisades of the past.

The life of preeminence, as with all life on this planet, has a mortal end. To allow our enormous power to delude us into seeing the world as a passive thing waiting for us to recreate it in an image of our choosing will hasten the day when we have little freedom to choose anything at all.

Madame Secretary, let me end by expressing, on behalf of all my colleagues, our profound respect for you and your record of accomplishment, and let me also stress our

confidence in you and your dedication to protecting and advancing the interests of our beloved country.

I now turn to my friend and esteemed colleague, Tom Lantos, for any remarks he may wish to make.